



NIEER Pre-K Data Snapshot:

Pre-K and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Alignment: 2018-2019 School Year

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Assessments of children’s learning and development can be important tools for teachers, administrators, and even parents. Used together with other information, they may inform the teaching of individual children and—when aggregated—decisions about how to support early education from the classroom to statewide levels. This snapshot uses data from the *State of Preschool* Yearbook surveys that have been collected for more than 15 years to investigate state policies regarding pre-K assessment. Questions include: which of the 45 states with state-funded pre-K programs require preschool child assessments and what assessment tools are used? We also evaluate whether or not they are aligned to required kindergarten assessments. While 38 of 45 states require their preschool programs to assess children’s learning and development during the preschool year(s), only four states use the same or an enhanced version of the same tool in both pre-K and kindergarten.

Requirement to Assess in Pre-K

During the 2018-2019 school year, 38 out of 45 states (84%) required that all children in their state-funded preschool program(s) be assessed during the pre-K year(s), while three states, Maryland, North Dakota, and Oklahoma did not require an assessment of any kind. Four additional states, California, Massachusetts, Missouri, and the District of Columbia, required at least one program or auspice to conduct pre-K assessments, but were not counted as part of the thirty-eight.

In Massachusetts and Missouri, the smaller state-funded program that is tied to the school district required assessments, while the larger program did not. The Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (UPK) enrolled almost 7,000 children and required assessments, while Chapter 70 served over 30,000 children and did not require assessments. Similarly, the Missouri Preschool Program enrolled 1,330 children and mandated that all children be assessed, while the 4,458 children served using funding from the Missouri Pre-K Foundation Formula were not.

In California, the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) required that children were assessed during preschool, while Transitional Kindergarten (TK) did not. During the 2018-2019 school year, 104,694 4-year-olds, or 21% of 4-year-olds in the state, attended the TK program, meaning that almost a quarter of the children entering kindergarten the following year did not receive an assessment of their learning and development during the year prior.

While D.C. only has one pre-K program, statute only required that children attending D.C. Universal Pre-K in public schools (DCPS) or community-based providers (CBOs) were assessed, while Public Charter

Schools (PCS) had independent authority to determine if they assess, and if they did, which tool to use. During the 2018-2019 school year, over half of the children in D.C. Universal Pre-K attended a classroom in a PCS, or 40% of 3- and 4-year-olds residing in the District. To have a cohesive early childhood system, all children's learning and development should be assessed continuously, starting as soon as they enter school.

Required Pre-K Assessment Tools

Thirty-eight states required all state-funded pre-K programs to assess children's learning and development, but the tool(s) used varied by state, and in the case of one multi-program state, also varied by program. Some states required all classrooms to use the same tool(s), while others provided an option of multiple assessment tools. Other states elected to leave the choice of tool as a local decision, thereby leaving alignment in the hands of local school districts rather than mandated by the state.

Local Choice of Assessment Tool

Seven states (18%), Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, New York, and Wisconsin allowed districts to decide what tool to use at the local level. Although tools could be selected at the local level, six states (all but Wisconsin) provided some sort of guidance or parameters as to how these tools should be selected. For example, Arizona required that the tool was aligned with the Arizona Early Learning Standards and Infant Toddler Development Guidelines and Illinois required that the tool be research-based. Maine required that the tool be research-based and be aligned to Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards. Connecticut has three programs and did not require a specific tool for any of them, but required that any assessment used be aligned with the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards.

Wisconsin has two state-funded preschool programs, 4K and Wisconsin Head Start, which is the state's supplement to Head Start. 4K required a literacy screening, but no tool is specified and programs were not required to select a tool that was aligned with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. Wisconsin Head Start required a comprehensive assessment aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Child Outcomes Framework: ages Birth to Five, but did not require a specific tool or provide a list of tools from which programs could choose (Head Start Bureau, n.d.).

Additionally, Oregon has two state-funded pre-K programs, Oregon Preschool Promise and Oregon Pre-Kindergarten, which is the state's Head Start supplement, but does not have alignment across the two programs. Preschool Promise gave programs the option of using Teaching Strategies GOLD; Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS); or another assessment that is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and the Oregon Early Learning and Kindergarten Guidelines. Oregon Pre-Kindergarten required all programs to assess children using Teaching Strategies GOLD. This means there could be alignment between the two programs, if Preschool Promise classrooms choose to use Teaching Strategies GOLD, but there is not full alignment between the two state-funded programs.

State Specifies Options

Ten states (26%) provided a list of multiple tools for programs to choose from at the local level, see Table 1. Colorado required that programs use either Teaching Strategies GOLD or HighScope COR, which

are both aligned to the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines. Other states, like North Carolina, provided a comprehensive list of curriculum and assessments that align with their Early Learning and Development Standards, from which programs can choose at the local level (see, [list](#)). In these ten states, alignment is possible, but would be determined at the local level. An individual school districts could choose to have all programs use the same assessment, but it is not mandated by state policy.

Pennsylvania has four state-funded preschool programs: the Ready to Learn Block Grant, the Pennsylvania Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (K4) and School-based Prekindergarten programs (SBPK), the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Program (PAPKC), and the state’s Head Start Supplement, Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (PAHSSAP). The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides a list of a list of approved curricula and required that each program select an assessment that is aligned with Pennsylvania’s Learning Standards for Early Childhood. Approved assessments include: HighScope COR, the Early Learning Scale, Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), and Teaching Strategies GOLD. The full list can be found, [here](#).

State Specifies the Assessment Tool

Twenty states (53%) required all programs and classrooms to use the same tool(s) to evaluate learning and development, see Table 2. Most states, 90% or eighteen of twenty, required just one tool, while two states, Mississippi and Montana, required two. Mississippi required the Mississippi State Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (to be administered in pre-K; a locally developed tool) and the Brigance III (a commercially developed tool). Mississippi also reported that some Early Learning Collaboratives used Star Early Learning Assessment. Montana required that programs use both the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) and Ages & Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE).

Sixteen of these twenty states required the use of a commercially available assessment. The most commonly used commercially available tool is Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD); ten states required the exclusive use of TS GOLD as their pre-K assessment tool. Other required assessments were the Work Sampling System (2), Brigance III (1), DIAL (1), ASQ-SE (1), Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS, 1), and the Early Learning Scale (1). Four states developed their own required pre-K assessment tools: Florida, New Mexico, Ohio, and Tennessee. The Tennessee Growth Portfolio was implemented during the 2017-2018 school year and while it only addresses English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, teachers are encouraged to select additional assessments to assess other domains.

Alignment Between Pre-K & Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Tools

Aligned assessments are a crucial part of developing a strong P-3 system that supports learning and development from early childhood into the K-12 system (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019). Yet, of the 20 states that required all pre-K programs to use the same tool(s), only four states, Delaware, Mississippi, Vermont, and Washington, used the same tool or an enhanced version of the tool in kindergarten during the 2018-2019 school year, see Table 2 (Weisenfeld et al., 2020). Delaware and Mississippi required the use of the same tool in both pre-K and kindergarten (Teaching Strategies GOLD in Delaware and the Mississippi State Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in Mississippi), which allows for a very straight-forward alignment.

Vermont and Washington both developed kindergarten assessment tools, but based them on Teaching Strategies GOLD, which was the required pre-K assessment.

One state, Louisiana, had partial or potential alignment of tools used in pre-K and kindergarten. Louisiana allows kindergarten classrooms the choice of two assessments: Desired Results Developmental Profile-Kindergarten (DRDP-K) or Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD). Louisiana requires the use of TS GOLD in pre-K so there is a possibility that some programs will have aligned assessment, but state policy does not mandate it.

Despite requiring pre-K assessments and mandating the use of a specific tool(s), six states, Alabama, Hawaii, Montana, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and West Virginia, did not require a kindergarten entry assessment. Alabama had a voluntary KEA that uses TS GOLD, the same tool required for pre-K, so there is the possibility of alignment, but without state policy that requires it, there is not state-wide alignment (Alabama Department of Early Education, 2017).

Finally, there were also nine states, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, New Mexico, Ohio, Tennessee, and Virginia, that required both a pre-K assessment and a kindergarten entry assessment, but the tool required was not the same. Some states, like Florida, assess the same domains in the pre-K and kindergarten assessments, despite using different tools (Office of Early Learning, 2018). New Mexico developed both their preschool assessment tool, the Preschool Observational Assessment, and the Kindergarten Observation Tool with the goal of aligning the system between preschool and kindergarten. Though the indicators varied and the tools are not the same, like Florida, the domains assessed remained consistent. New Mexico developed a crosswalk to examine the indicators used in both assessments that can be found [here](#).

Other states, like Ohio, assessed some of the same domains, but not all. Ohio's Early Learning Assessment, used in pre-K, assessed all seven domains of development: social foundations, mathematics, science, social studies, language and literacy, physical well-being and motor development, and fine arts (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.a.). However, Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment assessed only four areas of learning: social foundations (including approaches toward learning), mathematics, language and literacy, and physical well-being and motor development (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.b.). Despite having data about children's development in science, social studies, and the fine arts, the KEA will not continue to examine these areas of development.

Conclusion

As of 2019, thirty-eight states with state-funded pre-K programs required all children to be assessed during the pre-K year and thirty-four states and Washington D.C. required the use of a kindergarten entry assessment (KEA). Only four states required the use of the same tool in both pre-K and kindergarten to ensure alignment across the grade levels (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020; Weisenfeld et al., 2020). Those four states, Delaware, Mississippi, Vermont, and Washington, developed an aligned assessment system. In 2019, 20 states received over \$216 million in PDG B-5 Renewal Grants to bolster their early childhood birth-five systems. Ensuring alignment between pre-K and kindergarten entry assessments would be one productive way to build coherence in these systems.

About NIEER

The [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts independent, objective research to inform early childhood education policy promoting physical, cognitive and social development for all young children to succeed in school and later life.

NIEER researches and disseminates an annual [report](#) profiling state-funded preschool programs throughout the United States. NIEER's State of Preschool yearbook is the only national report on state-funded preschool programs with detailed information on enrollment, funding, teacher qualifications, and other policies related to quality, such as the presence of a qualified teacher and assistant, small class size, and low student-to-teacher ratio.

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Table 1: Ten States that Provide an Option of Tools to Use

State	Programs May Choose from....
Colorado	Teaching Strategies GOLD or HighScope COR
Kentucky	HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS) for Infants and Children, or Carolina Curriculum
Michigan	HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, or Assessment, Evaluation and Programming System (AEPS) for Infants and Children
Minnesota	Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, or Work Sampling
Nevada	Desired Results Developmental Profile, HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, or Other
New Jersey	Early Learning Scale, HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, or Work Sampling
North Carolina	HighScope COR, Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, or Other
Pennsylvania	HighScope COR, the Early Learning Scale, Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), and Teaching Strategies GOLD, or Other
South Carolina	HighScope COR, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, or Other
Texas	Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling, or CIRCLE Progress Monitoring

(Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020)

Table 2: Twenty States that Require All Programs and Classrooms to Use the Same Tool(s)

State	Required Pre-K Assessment Tool	KEA Required	Required KEA Tool
Alabama	Teaching Strategies GOLD	No	NA
Alaska	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	Alaska Developmental Profile
Arkansas	Work Sampling System	Yes	Choice of 3: Istation (ISIP), NWEA-Map for Growth, or Renaissance Star Early Literacy (STAR)
Delaware	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	Teaching Strategies GOLD
Florida	Florida VPK Assessment	Yes	Renaissance Star Early Literacy (STAR)
Georgia	Work Sampling System	Yes	Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills
Hawaii	Teaching Strategies GOLD	No	NA
Iowa	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	Determined Locally, but State Approved
Louisiana	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	Choice of 2: DRDP-K or Teaching Strategies GOLD
Mississippi	Mississippi State Kindergarten Readiness Assessment & Brigance III	Yes	Mississippi State Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Instrument (includes Renaissance Star Early Literacy (STAR))
Montana	Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) & Ages & Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE)	No	NA
Nebraska	Teaching Strategies GOLD	No	NA
New Mexico	New Mexico Preschool Observational Assessment	Yes	New Mexico Kindergarten Observation Tool
Ohio	Ohio's Early Learning Assessment	Yes	Kindergarten Readiness Assessment
Rhode Island	Teaching Strategies GOLD	No	NA
Tennessee	Growth Portfolio Model	Yes	Kindergarten Entry Inventory (adapted from DRDP-K)
Vermont	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	Ready For Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!S) (includes Teaching Strategies GOLD)
Virginia	Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)	Yes	Determined Locally
Washington	Teaching Strategies GOLD	Yes	WA Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WA KIDS) (based on Teaching Strategies GOLD)
West Virginia	Early Learning Scale	No	NA

(Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020; Weisenfeld et al., 2020)